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ABSTRACT

These three articles describe three programs operating under the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act (YEDPA), a comprehensive endeavor to lower the high rate of joblessness among youth. The first article focuses on the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects--popularly called Entitlement--which is an experimental and intensive program. It discusses this first large-scale effort to guarantee employment to a population segment which actively addresses itself to linking education and work. The second paper gives an account of the success of the Job Corps college program through its Advanced Career Training (ACT) program at colleges and postsecondary vocational institutions. The third article presents the story of Baltimore's Learning Works, an example of how a community benefits from a partnership formed by the government and the private sector. It discusses the use of PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations), a teaching computer, by educationally disadvantaged clients to finish their education and learn job serach skills. (YLB)

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Trio for Youth

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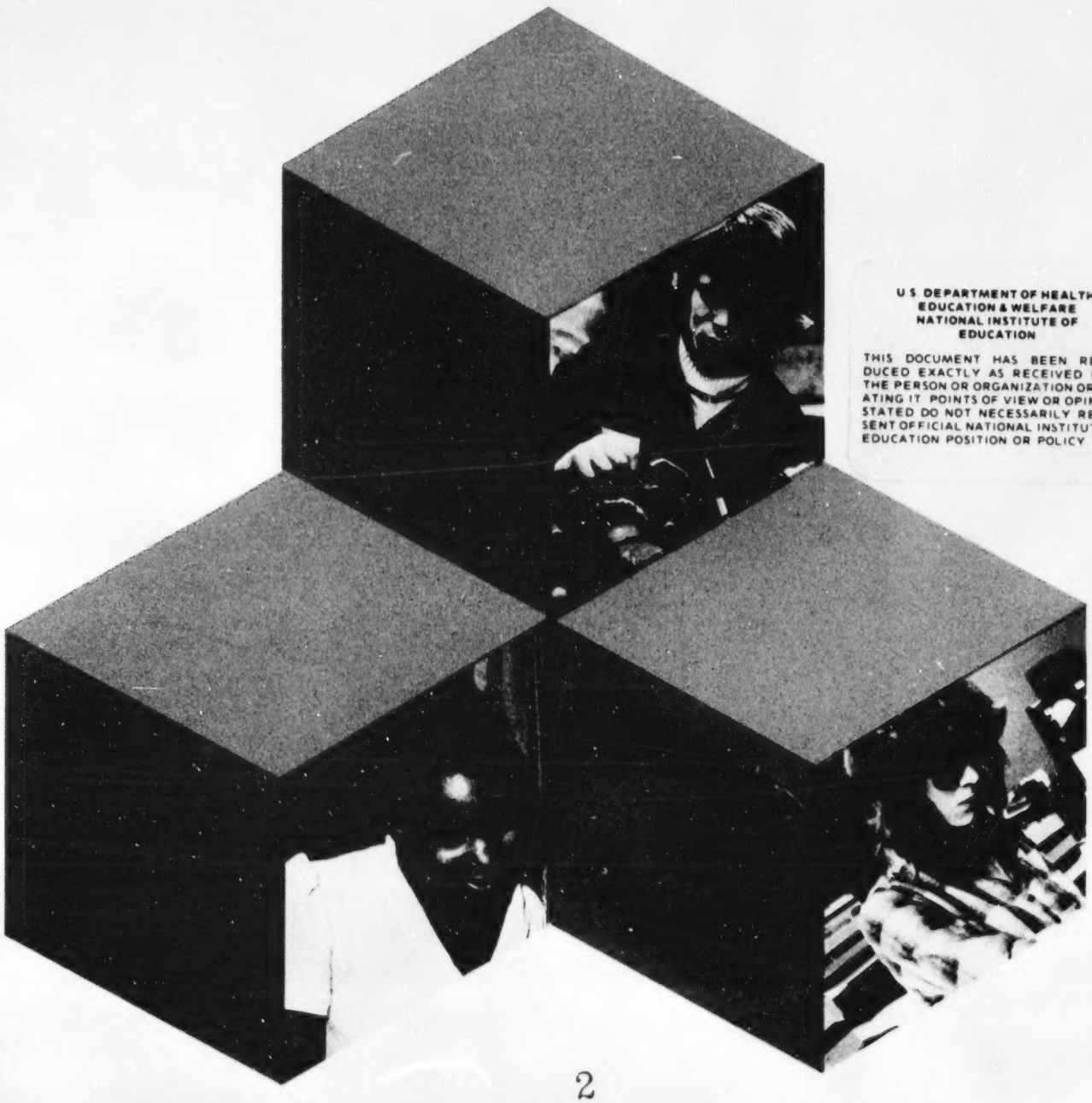

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Introduction

We can play a key role in making sure that America's young people will be better prepared to face the job market and that the job market will be better prepared to accommodate them.

Such is the philosophy expressed by Assistant Secretary Ernest G. Green, and the same thought underlies the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act (YEDPA). This collection of articles describes three programs operating under YEDPA, the most comprehensive endeavor America has made to bring down the high rate of joblessness among youth.

One of the most innovative of the YEDPA programs is the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects--or *Entitlement,* as it is popularly called. Entitlement is an experimental and intensive program with a lot of "firsts." For example, Entitlement is the first large-scale effort to guarantee employment to a population segment. And it goes further than any previous Federal effort in linking education and work.

The Job Corps, another link in the chain, has a "first" of its own: the Job Corps college program. An account of its success is included in this collection.

The story of Baltimore's Learning Works--an example of how a community benefits from a partnership formed by the government and the private sector--completes the trio of youth program reports.

Trio for Youth

Three Employment and Training Programs

U.S. Department of Labor
Ray Marshall, Secretary

Employment and Training Administration
Ernest G. Green, Assistant Secretary

Larry R. Moen
Director of Information

September 1979

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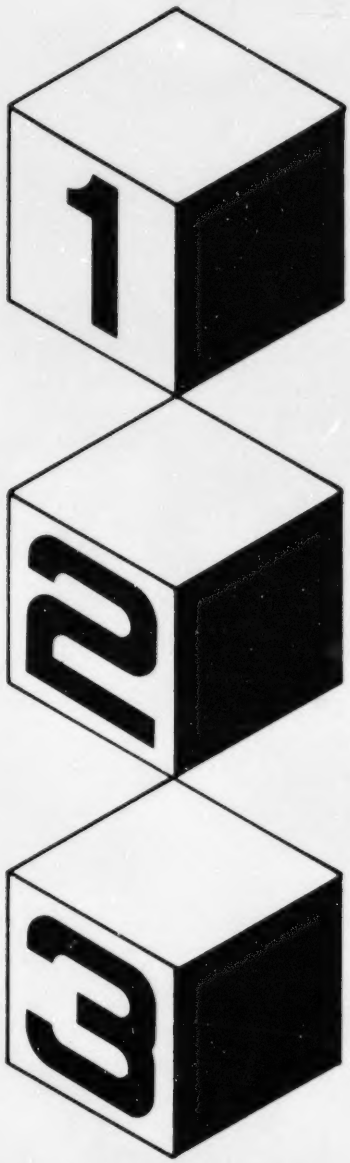


Entitlement: experimental, intense, and unique

by Robert Taggart
and Janet Rosenberg

Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects (YIEPP)—or Entitlement, as it is often called—is one of the most exciting and innovative initiatives under the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act (YEDPA).

- With $222 million in funding for 3 years, Entitlement *guarantees* part-time school year and full-time summer employment to all 16- to 19-year-old economically disadvantaged youth who are in school or return to school and who reside in one of 17 selected Entitlement project areas. (See box.) The program is the first large-scale effort to guarantee employment to a population segment.

- Entitlement is one of the most intensive employment and training efforts ever undertaken by Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) prime sponsors. The enrollments are almost double those nationwide under the Youth Community Conservation and Improvement Projects (YCCIP) and are larger than those under the Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC)—two other programs with nationwide focus initiated by YEDPA.

- Entitlement is also one of the most specifically directed programs ever undertaken. Participants must come from poor families and reside in selected Entitlement areas—with defined geographic boundaries. These qualifications insure that areas and youth with the most serious socioeconomic problems will be reached.

- The program goes further than any previous Federal effort in linking education and work. Participants must be registered in, attend, and perform adequately in school. Various alternative educational approaches are being implemented to serve those with special needs.

- The law permits full wage subsidies in the private sector, enabling Entitlement sites to put on the payroll participants who work in private businesses, thereby reducing the costs of hiring economically disadvantaged youth on a part-time and seasonal basis and, even more important, reducing the paperwork for the employer.

- Finally, Entitlement is one of the largest demonstration programs ever activated by the Federal Government. It provides critical information about how many young people really want to work, whether the requisite jobs for poor youth can be created or secured in the private sector, whether such an intensive program can be effectively administered, whether guaranteed employment can help promote disadvantaged youth's return to and completion of high school, and whether work plus increased education will improve the future of young persons with serious impediments to employment.

To implement such a unique program—with its massive scale, new mandates, and research requirements—it was necessary to take a unique approach: The Department of Labor called on the assistance of a nonprofit intermediary, the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC). MDRC had an excellent record of administering a supported work project and other large human resources development experiments. Under Entitlement, MDRC was given primary responsibility for the research dimensions of the project; it also provided expertise and advice in the choice of sites and in the implementation process.

One of the key problems was that of selecting demonstration sites. Because of the high costs of the job-guarantee, only a few large-scale saturation tests could be attempted. Therefore, a two-tier structure was adopted. Seven large-scale or Tier I sites were chosen to test the feasibility of implementing full-scale job guarantee programs. Each Tier I site covered a full or partial central city area or multicounty region, and each had a potential eligible pool of between 3,000 and 8,000 youth. Ten smaller Tier II projects were established which covered less populated areas or very small portions of a city. Providing between 200 and 1,000 Entitlement jobs, the Tier II sites were to focus on more innovative approaches.

All 17 sites were selected through a rigorous, two-stage, competitive process. One hundred and fifty-three prime sponsors applied. Of these, 34 received grants to prepare final proposals, and 17 were ultimately selected to run Entitlement demonstrations. The final selection of the sites was announced in January 1978, and the first Entitlement enrollees entered the program in March 1978.

For the selected prime sponsors, Entitlement was truly a test of their administrative capacity. The scale of the program was staggering: In some sites, within a few months, the level of employment and training efforts for youth was doubled or tripled. The primes had to be concerned with developing jobs quickly and assigning thousands of youth. The jobs had to be new ones that did not substitute for existing workers and at the same time provide meaningful work opportunities. Careful matching was necessary to assure that jobs were at the right hours and in the right places to enable a youth to hold a job and continue schooling. The prime sponsors had to work closely with educational institutions to monitor school performance and to find alternative educational arrangements. Each feature of Entitlement—the strict standards for eligibility, the continuous job

Robert Taggart is administrator of the Office of Youth Programs and Janet Rosenberg is special assistant to the administrator.

In Baltimore--one of 17 Entitlement project sites--the Inner Harbor Marina becomes a training place for maritime careers.

Black Star photo by John Troha

creation requirement, the necessary monitoring of schooling performance and attendance, and the private sector subsidies, posed new implementation problems. The demanding research design required exceptional sophistication in the generation and collection of standardized, comprehensive data.

An incredibly detailed research effort has been undertaken to learn as much as possible from this experiment: How well does the program accomplish what it was designed to achieve? Are there significant impacts on participants? Should Entitlement be extended nationally? The legislative origins of the program make it clear that the research findings are to serve as a foundation for future policy decisions. In fact, Congress has taken the unusual step of specifying questions it wants answered by the Entitlement demonstration.

To respond to these questions, MDRC has designed a three-part research plan for analyzing the impact, implementation, and costs of Entitlement. A central Entitlement Information System has been established to collect and tabulate the extensive data the research demands. The system processes information on the economic and demographic characteristics of enrollees, including the time spent in the program, the hours worked, the money earned, the kinds of schools attended, and the distribution of jobs by type of work, employer, and industry. A large-scale longitudinal sampling of eligible youth was begun in four Entitlement sites and four control sites to measure economic and other impacts on areas and individuals. To date, there have been three major products from these efforts: (1) *A Summary Report on the Start-Up Period of the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects;* (2) *Youth Entitlement: Program Implementation; and* (3) *Youth Entitlement: Baseline Report.* The elaborate research design promises to yield major findings about education and work and the employment problems of poor youth. Meanwhile, there are some important early findings.

Perhaps the most significant lesson to date is that CETA prime sponsors can be extremely flexible and can deliver under the most trying circumstances. Given the formidable challenges, it is remarkable that the program, with all its new elements and its complex research designs, was mounted so smoothly. There were startup problems at several sites as they rushed to implement what began as an 18-month program. But with some stress and strain, the program quickly got underway. The first enrollees were on board in late March 1978, and by June 1978 there were 29,600 enrollees. Although the research design was one of the most elaborate ever undertaken, it was put in place despite the implementation workload. The answer to Congress' first question as to whether the Entitlement concept is operationally feasible to date is *yes.*

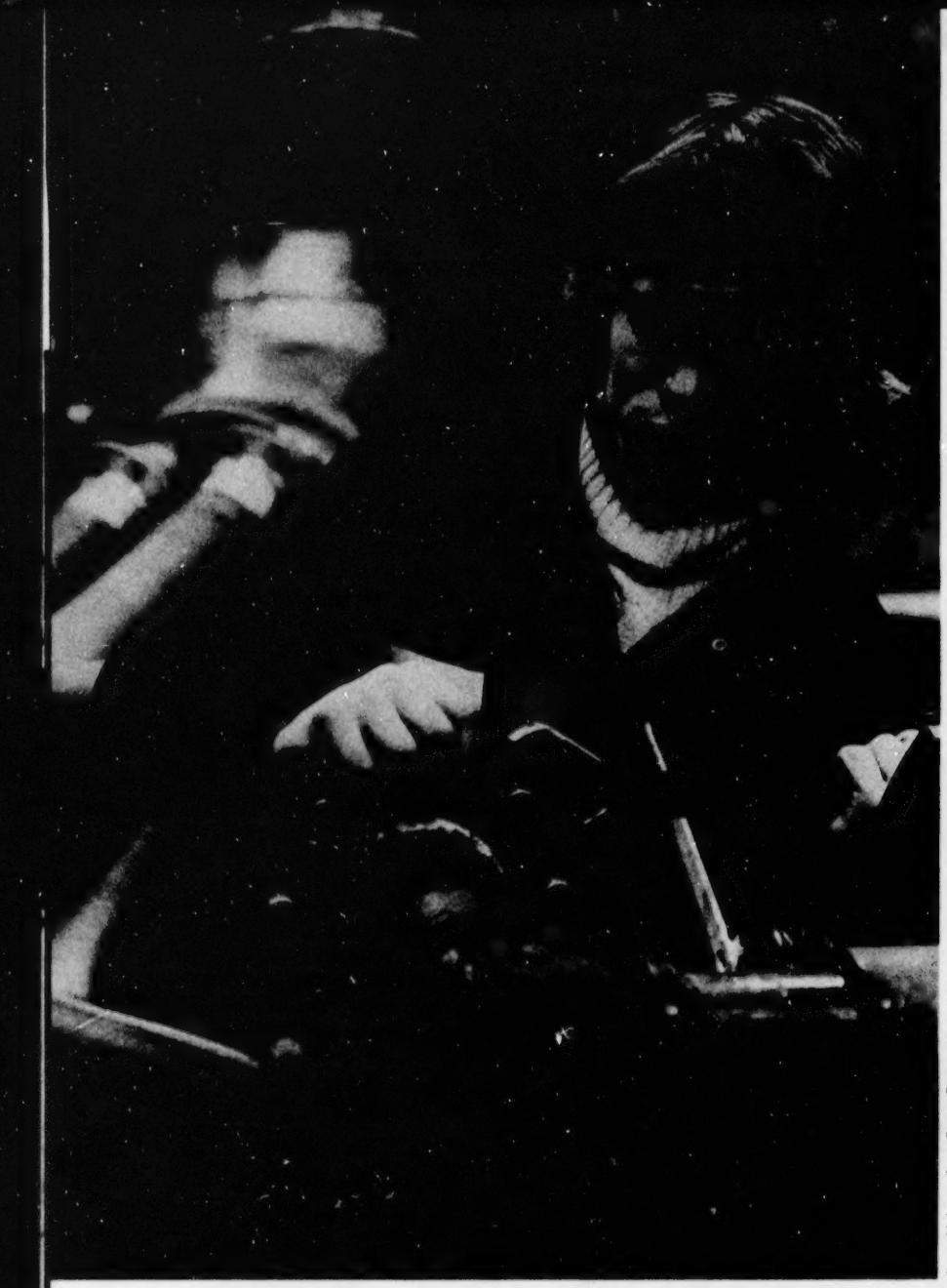
Do poor youth really want to work, was a second major question. Some observers believed that jobs were available for those with drive and ambition, and that poor youth had unrealistic expectations. Whatever the validity of these opinions, there is no doubt that eligible young people took jobs when they were offered. For instance, in the city of Baltimore, the number of eligible youth employed by CETA in the summer months of 1978 was estimated to be five times the level of the previous summer. In some sites, close to 100 percent of eligible in-school youth are working in Entitlement. Out-of-school youth have been harder to attract because they have to return to school settings they had left. A best guess at this point is that between a fourth and a third of eligible out-of-school youth might enroll. During the first 9 months of operation, students were the first employed. Outreach and the establishment of alternative education opportunities subsequently raised the proportion of participants who had ever been dropouts to 15 percent.

Third, it is clear that the youth who benefit from such a program need help and that Entitlement is an effective way of providing resources. The participants are all from low-income families, about half of whom receive cash welfare. The average parents have less than a ninth grade education. Four-fifths of participants are minorities. One out of every six eligible youth has a child, including over 50 percent of the eligible 19-year-old females. The pilot project sites were selected to achieve a diversity of geographic and economic conditions, for youth with severe problems are almost everywhere. The targeting under Entitlement has concentrated resources to meet their needs.

A fourth major question was whether meaningful jobs could be created in the

Lynn McLaren from Photo Researchers, Inc.

Eligible youth did not turn down jobs.



Performing work that helps communities.

Lynn McLaren from Photo Researchers, Inc.

public sector or made accessible in the private sector. Some critics believed that government and nonprofit employment were already "saturated" and that productive jobs could not be created. Seven-eighths of the hours of employment since the start of Entitlement have been in the public or nonprofit sector. Detailed evaluations of the value of output from these jobs are underway; early evidence suggests that youth *are* working in *real* jobs, contributing to their communities. There is certainly no evidence of wholesale "make work."

Private sector participation has varied in different sites. In Denver and Detroit more than a fourth of the work has been in the private sector. In the Philadelphia Tier II project site, the private sector has provided two-thirds of the jobs. By contrast, the private sector in Baltimore and Mississippi accounts for less than 10 percent of jobs. It seems that even when 100 percent wage subsidies are offered and the burdens of paperwork and red tape reduced, private employers do not jostle each other trying to hire disadvantaged youth. Establishing relations with private sector employers is a continuing process.

A fifth question asked whether school-linked jobs could reduce dropout rates and induce a return to school. The first "scientific" assessment of the impacts will be available in the fall of 1979. Present indications suggest that out-of-school youth are not easy to reach and to coax back to school, and that part-time work may not be lure enough for many. Clearly such youth prefer nontraditional educational opportunities. For those who chose this option, it is doubtful that many could pursue education without the income support. Some anecdotal evidence indicates that Entitlement is increasing attendance rates and performance in some of the schools. The programs have improved their enrollment rates among out-of-school youth, and the portion of enrollees who were dropouts the previous semester increased from 6 to 15 percent in Tier I sites between the spring and fall of 1978.

Much more will be learned from Entitlement; in fact, it may prove to be the most fruitful experiment in subsidized employment linked to education ever undertaken. It already provides some important inputs for youth employment policy. The Entitlement demonstration shows that the implementation of a large-scale job guarantee program is feasible and that massive expansion of local youth employment opportunities is a reasonable option. It shows that poor youth will certainly take jobs if they are available. It shows that there can be more linkages between education and work experience than in the past, and that CETA dollars can create alternative education opportunities that attract youth from the street back to school. It shows that even the 100 percent wage subsidy authorized in the legislation does not guarantee an "open sesame" to the private sector, although it does provide a foundation for increasing involvement. In short, the fundamental concepts of the Entitlement project are operable and expandable. Entitlement appears to be one way of reaching and employing the large numbers of poorest youth who are not served by existing programs.

What the net impact of the program is on the youth who participate is still

unknown. The most important—and as yet unanswered question—is whether they will benefit over the long run. Entitlement may not be the most "cost-effective" program approach. Experience to date, however, justifies optimism. One 17-year-old Entitlement participant, who works as a secretary in Baltimore's Dunbar High School, put it this way:

"If I wasn't in this program, I'd probably be going crazy, hanging out on the streets, probably getting into trouble. This program helps me earn some money, learn more skills, and work toward finishing high school. I don't know what I'll do when I get out, but at least I'll have some experience. I think more kids should be able to be in this program." □

In the two-tier structure adopted for Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects (YIEPP), the following 17 areas were chosen as Entitlement project sites:

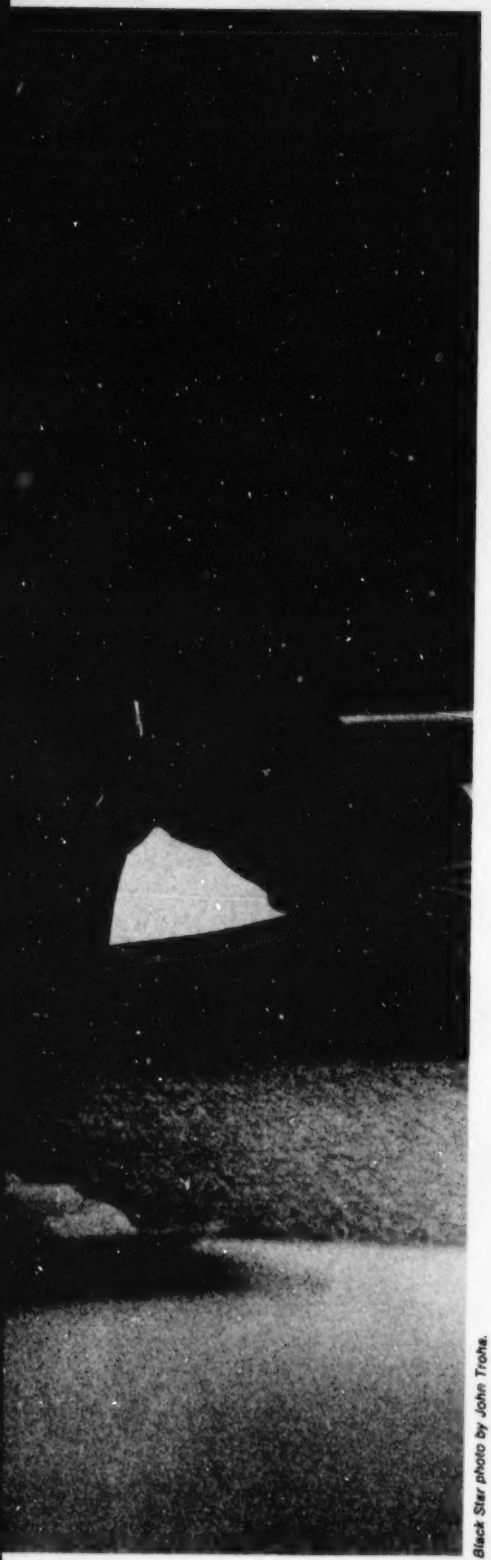
Tier I project ($10 to $23 million in grants):

- Baltimore Metropolitan Manpower Consortium, Md.
- City of Boston, Mass.
- City of Detroit, Mich.
- Balance-of-State of Mississippi, Jackson, Miss.
- City of Cincinnati, Ohio
- City and County of Denver, Colo.
- King-Snohomish Manpower Consortium, Seattle, Wash.

Tier II projects (up to $1.5 million in grants):

- Alachua County, Gainesville, Fla.
- City of Albuquerque, N. Mex.
- City of Berkeley, Calif.
- Hillsborough County, Manchester, N.H.
- Miami Valley Manpower Consortium, Dayton, Ohio
- County of Monterey, Salinas, Calif.
- New York City, N.Y.
- City of Philadelphia, Pa.
- Steuben County, Bath, N.Y.
- City of Syracuse, N.Y.

Linking education and subsidized employment generates great opportunities.



Black Star photo by John Troha.

Youth Entitlement Demonstration Characteristics

As of the end of March 1979, there were 32,736 youth enrolled in the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects.

School dropouts comprised 13 percent of program enrollments.

A growing majority of youth entering the demonstration project are 16 years of age. In the quarter ending in March, more than half of all youth enrolled were 16.

Ethnically, 17 percent of enrollees were white, 73 percent black, and 8 percent Hispanic.

A major portion of the hours worked by Entitlement youth were in clerical and administrative assistant type jobs, in building construction and related jobs, and in community and recreational work. The enrollment of male and female participants was about 50-50, with slightly more females.

Characteristics of Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Project Enrollees—First Half of Fiscal Year 1979

Site	Total youth enrolled at end of March	Percent school dropouts enrolled (during quarter ending March)	Percent private for-profit of cum. hours worked	Percent white	Percent black	Percent Hispanic
Tier I						
Baltimore, Md.	7,496	21	9.6	2	98	0
Boston, Mass.	6,008	13	15.9	35	52	9
Cincinnati, Ohio	2,644	13	9.1	9	91	0
Denver, Colo.	1,898	13	27.6	13	39	43
Detroit, Mich.	4,808	5	33.2	4	90	6
Seattle, Wash.	1,674	23	2.2	56	27	3
Jackson, Miss.	5,195	9	7.3	20	80	0
Total	29,723	13	13.6	17	74	7
Tier II						
Gainesville, Fla.	174	0	6.2	9	91	0
Albuquerque, N. Mex.	382	5	0	5	16	76
Berkeley, Calif.	634	9	1.8	10	80	6
Dayton, Ohio	45	0	8.3	0	100	0
Manchester, N.H.	109	17	65.5	93	3	3
Salinas, Calif.	144	8	65.6	7	1	89
New York, N.Y.	625	0	26.4	3	94	3
Philadelphia, Pa.	179	0	64.7	0	99	1
Bath, N.Y.	135	33	0	99	0	1
Syracuse, N.Y.	586	2	23.5	28	69	2
Total	3,013	5	20.2	18	62	18
Total Demonstration	32,736	13 (avg.)	14.2 (avg.)	17.5 (avg.)	68 (avg.)	12.5 (avg.)

Source: Office of Youth Programs, Employment and Training Administration

Job Corpsmembers go collegiate

by Susan Weiss

Debra Keel dropped out of school after the ninth grade. No one ever considered her to be college material. Yet, thanks to Job Corps, Keel is scheduled to graduate from West Virginia State College in December with an Associate in Arts degree in sociology. Keel maintains a strong B average and expects to complete the 2-year program in 1½ years. She has been selected "Miss Sophomore" by her follow students. In other words, while no one else was considering Keel as a candidate for college, Job Corps was quietly making plans and laying the groundwork for this very event.

Keel's success in the Job Corps college program doesn't conform to what many sociologists are saying. They see our technological society as creating an underclass of unemployables who will pass the legacy of poverty on from generation to generation. Perhaps one of the more graphic definitions of poverty came from a former Job Corps student, who said, "Poverty is when you don't have much money, you think you are worthless, and you see no way to change your situation. Some people inherit poverty just like other people inherit money."

Recent Employment and Training Administration (ETA) data on the characteristics of Job Corps enrollees show that most youth joining the program bring with them the legacy of poverty. Almost 100 percent are poor, 70 percent are minority group members, and 86 percent are high school dropouts. Job Corps has offered training to 550,000 youth in the past 15 years and has, in many cases, broken the cycle of poverty. Job Corps graduates have gone on to become bricklayers, painters, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, secretaries, meatcutters, cooks, mechanics, nurse aides, and wage earners in a host of other skilled occupations.

Until recently, however, the way out of poverty in the Job Corps was almost exclusively through the skilled, blue-collar trades. This is no longer the case. In December 1977, Job Corps announced its Advanced Career Training (ACT) program at colleges and post-secondary vocational institutions. Now, more than 1,300 Corpsmembers are attending colleges, universities, and vocational institutions throughout the country. Under ACT, Job Corps pays for tuition, books, and room and board for up to 2 years for Corpsmembers participating in the program.

National Director of the Job Corps Raymond Young says, "ACT is one of the ways we are expanding Job Corps to provide more career opportunities to more Corpsmembers." Young adds that he believes ACT is allowing Corpsmembers to attend college "who never considered that option open to them before."

Take, for example, Tijuana Hayes. Although Hayes may have aspired to a college education, it is doubtful that she would have made it into college without the General Educational Development (GED) program and other supports offered at the Y-WE-ACT Jobs Corps Center in Baltimore, Md. At Y-WE-ACT, Hayes passed her GED qualifying test for a high school diploma and entered Baltimore Community College. She is now a prepharmacy student and received a 3.5 grade point average in her first quarter. Hayes is one of many Job Corps ACT students who are doing exceptionally well in college.

ACT program planners had some reservations before the program began. Robert Taggart, administrator of ETA's Office of Youth Programs, says:

"There was uncertainty about the proportion of Corpsmembers who could succeed in the college setting. The amount of supportive services required was an issue, as was the degree of integration of Corpsmembers with other students. It was also unknown whether ACT would have a greater impact on future employability."

A preliminary analysis of the ACT program was prepared by Josie Gomez, Job Corps' national office ACT coordinator, and Taggart last October. The report found that participants had grades about average for the institutions they were attending, and that the dropout rate for ACT students was lower than that of other Corpsmembers who passed the 90-day enrollment period in Job Corps. There were also indications that Corpsmembers were being successfully integrated into all phases of college life. However, Taggart says, "The program is still being evaluated, and it is not yet clear whether and for whom and in what ways it is most effective." According to Gomez, a further analysis and evaluation is planned in the near future.

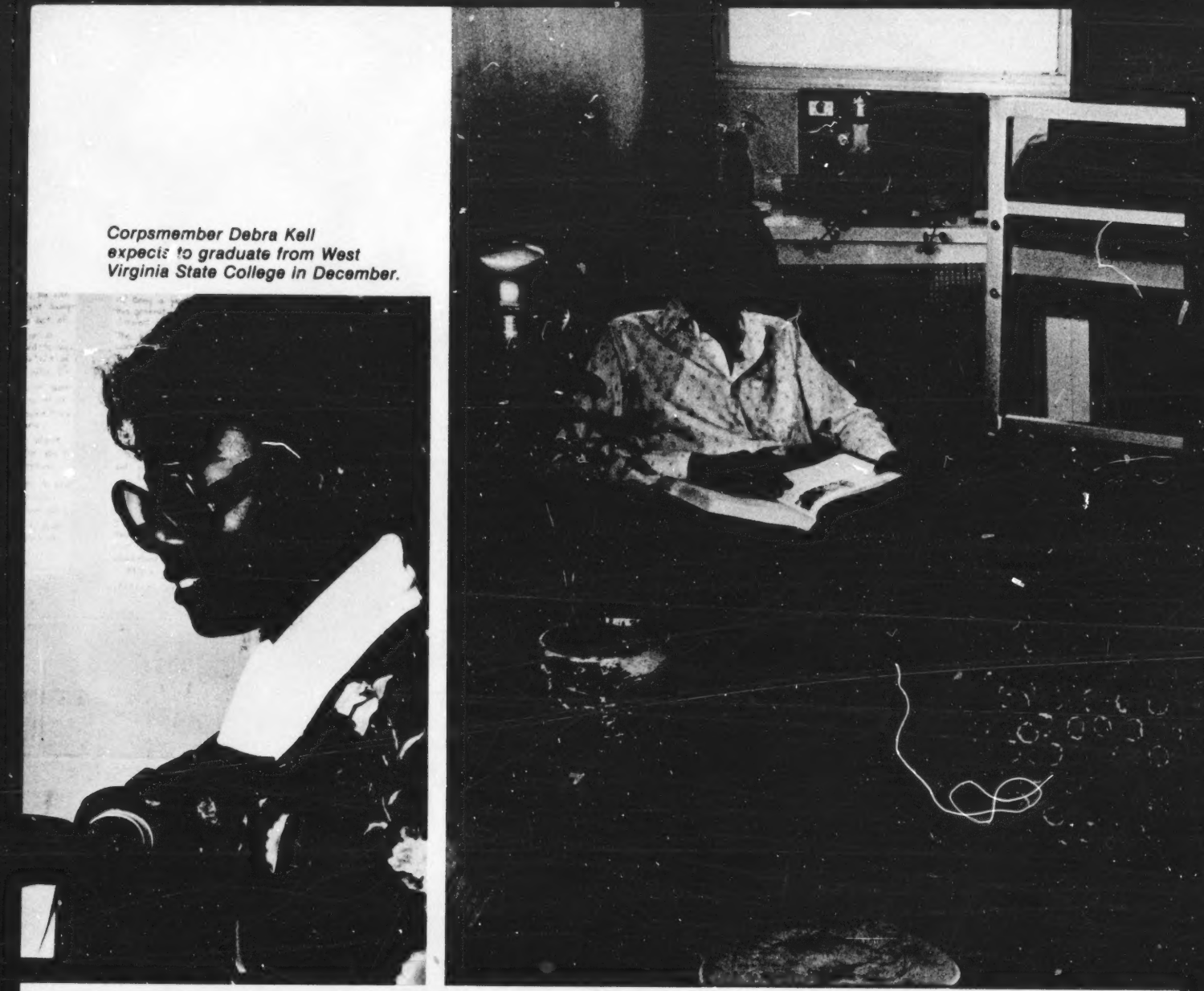
ACT coordinators at many centers are less cautious in their evaluation of the program. "We are now beginning to see our successes," says Dennis Mayer, ACT coordinator at Clearfield (Utah) Job Corps Center. "College is a door most of these students never dreamed of passing through. It's very exciting." Mayer reports that, of 30 Job Corps students attending Weber State College in Ogden, Utah, during the last quarter, 7 had better than a 3.0 average. "That represents almost a third of our students," says Mayer. "One of the Weber students, Edward Mitchell, received a 4.0, and Debbie Albert maintained a 3.93 after 56 credit hours," Mayer adds.

Clearfield students at other colleges appear to be doing well, also. Lake Region Junior College in South Dakota awarded five Corpsmembers Associate in Science (A.S.) degrees this spring, and Trinidad State Junior College in Colorado awarded two A.S. degrees

Photo by Stephen Carroll

Susan Weiss is assistant editor of the monthly Job Corps publication *Happenings*.

Corpsmembers in Baltimore's Y-WE-ACT program at Baltimore Community College.



Corpsmember Debra Kell expects to graduate from West Virginia State College in December.

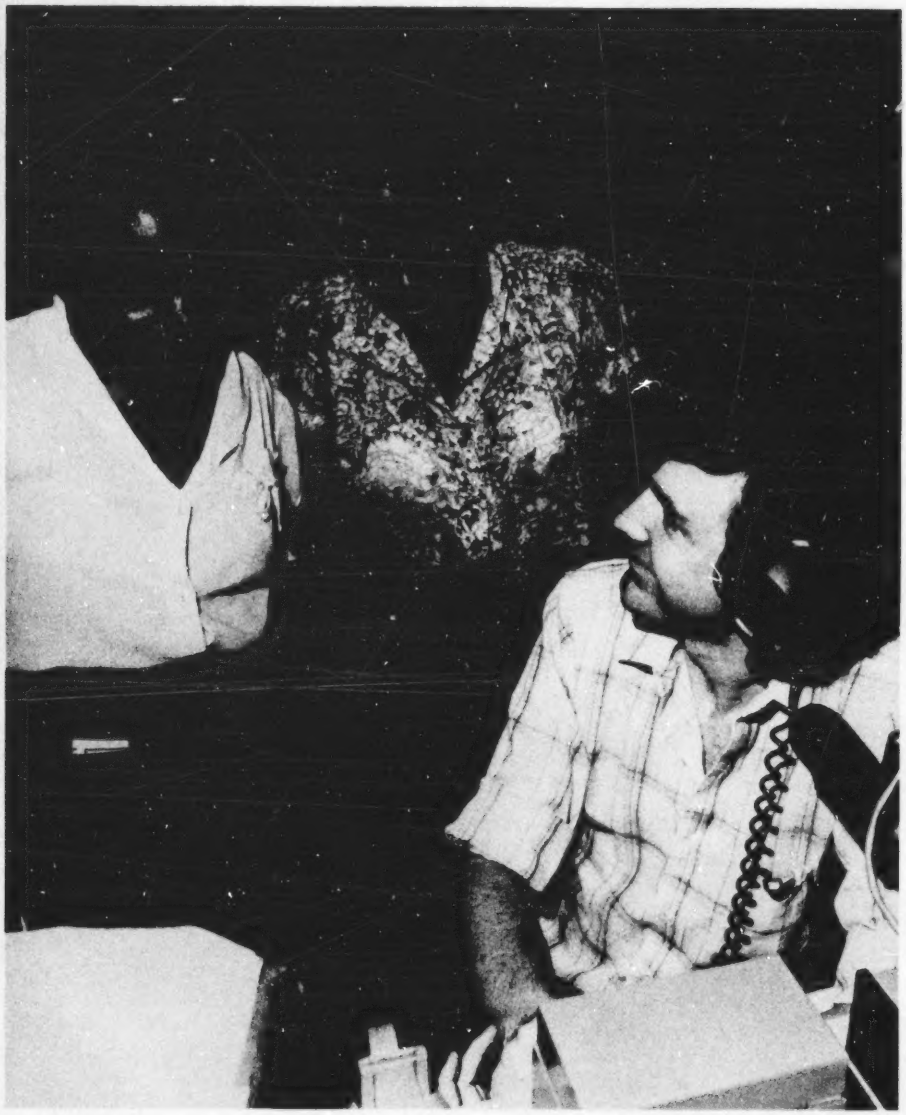
and 18 vocational certificates to Clearfield Corpsmembers.

Letitia Marker, college clerk at the Gary (Tex.) Job Corps Center, says, "I think the Job Corps college program is a fantastic opportunity, and I urge our students to take advantage of it. I've seen students change and find direction through the college program." One former Gary student, Audrey A. Domec, is scheduled to graduate from Houston-Tillitson College in Austin, Tex., with a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology in December. Domec is a deans list student and a member of Alpha Kappa Mu Honor Society. Kenneth Pope, also from the Gary Center, is a deans list student at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Tex., and served as secretary of the University's Student Senate during his last semester.

Although many of the Corpsmembers now attending college are working toward degrees in the liberal arts and sciences, it should be noted that most are enrolled in technical vocational programs, such as welding, auto mechanics, drafting, and food service.

As the college population declined during the seventies, institutions of postsecondary and higher education began offering vocational and technical training as a way of attracting more students. The present existence of the ACT program is related to the changes that took place in community and junior colleges. Although some Job Corps centers offer advanced training, it is not economically feasible for most centers to offer such training for the few who would benefit from it. Since many community and junior colleges were underutilized, it made more sense to turn to them for advanced study than to create in-house programs. As these colleges provide training in technical and vocational areas as well as the liberal arts,

Baltimore Community College provides Job Corps members with comfortable dorm rooms and gives Y-WE-ACT program participants learning opportunities at the campus radio station.



Photos by Stephen Carroll.

college became a feasible alternative for advanced study by Corpsmembers.

Job Corps students are studying courses as varied as broadcasting, law enforcement, electronic communication, gunsmithing, construction maintenance, and marine technology as well as the more familiar technical offerings.

According to Sheila Moore, coordinator of the college program at Y-WE-ACT in Baltimore, students starting out at Baltimore Community College often begin in the liberal arts and sciences. "Initially," Moore says, "they take the traditional courses such as psychology or sociology, but many change to computer science, dental technology, physical therapy, and other technical studies. I think that once they get to college they learn more about technical vocations and see them as a way to a good job."

For the most part, Job Corps students are adjusting to the social environment of college as well as to the academic life. Some have become campus leaders. Weber State College reports that Job Corps students are in student government, on school athletic teams, and are involved in other activities as well. Ed Borkowski, a student at Black Hills State College in Spearfish, S. Dak., maintains a B average while carrying a course load of 22 semester hours. He also works as a disk jockey at the college radio station and received a scholarship for his contribution to the college debating team. Bruce Baker, an Eastern Montana College Student, recently traveled to Romania with the college jazz ensemble. Houston-Tillitson College nursing student Peggy Penn was selected to represent the college at the United Negro College Fund premedical summer instruction program at Fisk University in Nashville, Tenn. These are but a few of the Job Corps students who are leaving their marks on the colleges they are attending.

Perhaps Baltimore Community College student John Palm best typifies the Job Corps college student. Palm transferred from Harpers Ferry (W. Va.) Job Corps Center to the Y-WE-ACT Job Corps Center in August 1978 and is an accounting major with a 2.9 grade point average. Coordinator Sheila Moore says of Palm, "He tries so hard. He even had our accountant here at the center helping him. Palm sets goals for himself and, what he lacks in skills he compensates for by studying conscientiously." Moore says that she hopes Palm will receive financial aid so that he can complete his education in his home city, Philadelphia, when his Job Corps funds expire. "I have no doubt that Palm will make it," Moore adds.

ACT program planners would be the first to say that college isn't for everyone. However, they have found something interesting about the centers with the most successful college programs. "It is surprising," says Robert Taggart, "that some of the centers with the most educationally and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations have the highest rates of usage of the college program. It is not for everyone, but it is an option for many in the Job Corps target population."

The addition of the college program means that Job Corps can now put students in the mainstream of every area of American life. In serving the needs of poor youth caught in the poverty cycle, Job Corps now offers every option and every opportunity enjoyed by the population at large. □

The name of the game is learning

by J. Michael Harrison

Jobseekers who use the Learning Works have a computer to command. To respond to the automatic teacher, program participants simply touch its screen.

Photos by J. Michael Harrison

When you mention PLATO in Baltimore, it's not Greek to Baltimoreans. It's a talking computer whose name is PLATO. Actually, PLATO doesn't speak. And it has neither red, yellow, blue, or green flashing lights nor the beeps of Star War's kindly R2-D2. PLATO's message comes through loud and clear and when it comes to teaching, PLATO is at the head of its class.

PLATO is a teaching computer. The letters P-L-A-T-O stand for Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations. Thanks to PLATO, basic reading, language, and math skills are quickly mastered by jobseekers who go to school at a place known as Baltimore's Learning Works. It's Baltimore's response to the special needs of jobseekers who are at an educational disadvantage in today's job market. Learning Works, funded by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), is a perfect example of how government and the private sector can form a partnership from which the community takes all the profits.

Opened in February of 1978 with over $200,000 in CETA funds from the Mayor's Office of Manpower Resources and a 2-year commitment of $450,000 from Commercial Credit Co., Learning Works began operation with 37 students. The goal was to provide these 37 jobseekers with secretarial training, and at the same time to upgrade their education skills with the PLATO curriculum. After the training and the chance to learn at their own pace, however, would they be able to compete with high school graduates with the same skills? The answer came the following October. Of the 37, 20 had jobs, 2 had earned high school General Education Development (GED) certificates, and 2 were waiting for GED test results. Every student had reached at least an eighth grade level of competence in reading—a remarkable achievement from a group some might have called functionally illiterate.

How can PLATO do what other teaching methods can't? By using personalized tutoring, individualized testing, and a touch-sensitive video screen, PLATO at first makes learning seem like a game.

Teaching by computer is not new; in fact, the University of Illinois pioneered the idea almost 17 years ago. Today, in at least 55 colleges and universities across America, thousands of students take courses in chemistry, languages, veterinary medicine, and other subjects by sitting at a keyboard communicating with a computer.

Commercial Credit Co.'s corporate parent, Control Data, started the development of PLATO back in 1960. By 1976, more than 2,000 users were preparing new courseware to use with and add to the PLATO course catalog. Over 20,000 people have already experienced this fascinating learning process, unlike anything in a conventional classroom.

Centrally located in the downtown branch of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Learning Works is now the home for more than 18 PLATO computer terminals and the hundreds of jobseekers who use them. Looking into what everyone refers to as the PLATO room, one sees people alternately touching the screen and pushing a button that says "NEXT." They are studying. It could be reading, writing, or math. Animated figures on the screen tell the student whether he/she has chosen the right or wrong answer. Should a student choose the wrong answer, the screen will repeat the question. When the student picks the right answer, or learns to solve the problem, the machine responds with an animated "Dynamite," or "Terrific," or "Way to go." PLATO talks to students on a first name basis: users have their own programs and password. If their minds should wander, which rarely seems to happen, PLATO signals and on the screen come the words "John, where are you?"

Basic skill inventories give each user an idea of where to start. Learning then becomes a step-by-step, individualized process. Students learn nouns and verbs, test their competency, and move on to sentences. Completing a strand—or level of proficiency—permits one to move on to the next strand. If all the material in a strand hasn't quite been mastered, PLATO takes students back until they've got it. A stern taskmaster, PLATO is also refreshingly humane. There's no such thing as failing, because a mistake is between student and machine. In a conventional classroom, when a student doesn't know the answer, he/she is embarrassed in front of peers. A wrong answer to PLATO, however, produces the encouragement to "Try again."

It's not surprising, then, that PLATO students achieve eighth grade reading

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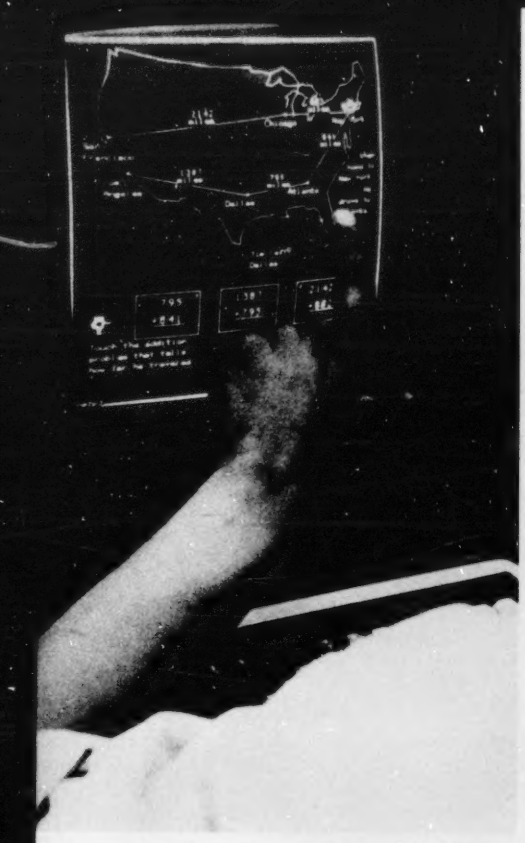

competence three times faster than they would in a traditional classroom setting.

Positive results have made Learning Works grow. Its doors are now open Monday through Friday for more than 65 hours weekly. The goal of 80 hours a week is not far off. The 40 participants using PLATO and learning secretarial skills taught by Hamilton Business School have been joined by jobseekers who know that a better education leads to better jobs. The changing of the guard comes at 3:00 p.m. each day. Jobseekers of all ages flock to the YMCA to work on their high school equivalencies. Some are enrolled in other CETA programs, for ex-offenders, for example, or are participating in an adult work experience program. Some are public service employees and others are in the Work Incentive (WIN) program. They all come to learn, and they all hope to get the help they need to land good jobs.

About 120 individuals participating in other employment and training programs come to Learning Works each week. What do they think of PLATO? The answer is always the same. They say they are learning more and learning faster than they thought possible. Jobseekers in their forties, like the younger students, appreciate the privacy of the PLATO learning experience. It's not uncommon for someone to try PLATO for the first time and to come away saying. "I wish they had had these computers when I went to school. I would never have dropped out."

Recently a special group of more than 70 teenagers, enrolled in Baltimore's $35 million Youth Incentive Entitlement Program, began coming to Learning Works. Part of the national experiment to test ways of solving teenage unemployment, the entitlement program also showed the need for educational alternatives. Disadvantaged youth 16 to 19 years old are guaranteed a job if they stay in school or, in the case of dropouts, return to some type of educational program. Baltimore manpower officials soon realized that dropouts left school at different grade levels and would therefore require an individualized learning program. PLATO was the answer. So, in addition to getting jobs, these young people have a second chance to finish their educations and are making the best of it. PLATO has also been programed to teach them job search skills, such as filling out applications and writing resumes. They're preparing for the world of work in more ways than one.

For Commercial Credit and the Baltimore CETA program, the partnership has grown both in scale and in satisfaction. Commercial Credit officials are extremely proud that their computer products help Baltimore's unemployed to find good job opportunities. Baltimore's Mayor William D. Shaefer believes that private/public cooperation is contagious, noting that "The private sector is also demonstrating its support for Learning Works every time it hires a graduate."

With more and more attention focused on the structurally unemployed, programs like Baltimore's Learning Works take on new significance. For the person who cannot read or write, there are few job opportunities. Skill training alone cannot really change that picture. Clearly, training, combined with remedial education, is the most effective approach to structural unemployment. While some manpower experts think government should operate such programs, others believe the private sector is better equipped to do the job. In Baltimore, the success of the PLATO approach indicates that what it really takes is the combined commitment of both government and the private sector.

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